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ABSTRACT

In 1987, the Annie E. Casey Foundation invited 10 medium-sized U.S. cities to apply to be part of the "New Futures" project, a program designed for cities that showed willingness and capacity to experiment with comprehensive, collaborative, public-private approaches to the multiple problems of at-risk children. Eventually, five cities were chosen: Savannah (Georgia); Little Rock (Arkansas); Dayton (Ohio); Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania); and Lawrence (Massachusetts). These sites set out to test the premises of New Futures: that strong political leadership, interagency cooperation, case management, and other innovations could reduce teen pregnancy and dropout rates and improve school achievement and youth employment within 5 years. The initiative was not successful in three cities, but in Savannah and Little Rock, the projects became catalysts for innovation and reform. This interview with Don Crary from Little Rock and Otis Johnson from Savannah explores the successes and failures of the New Futures initiative in these cities. The key insight drawn from these experiences is that systems reform is about changing relationships. A result of the New Futures initiative is a change in the way that foundations and community builders think about and provide technical assistance and evaluation. Requirements for more and better technical assistance, more attention to collaboration, increased opportunities for peer learning and support, and new thinking about how to help sites develop their internal capacities for improvement are lessons from New Futures. (SLD)

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The Eye of the Storm

Ten Years on the Front Lines of New Futures

an interview with Otis Johnson and Don Crary

by Joan Walsh

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation

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Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the generous time given to the development of this report by Don Crary and Otis Johnson. Their willingness to share their candid reflections and recommendations not only made this publication possible, but will help inform the journeys of others who choose to take up the challenge of rebuilding urban communities.

Don Crary received his bachelor's degree from Duke University and his master's degree from Southern Methodist University. Prior to assuming the position in 1988 as Executive Director of New Futures for Youth in Little Rock, Arkansas, he served for nine years as the Executive Director of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families. He currently serves on the Governor's Partnership Council, which recommends strategies for integrating children and family services throughout the state.

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Foreword

"New Futures," an ambitious five-city initiative launched by the Casey Foundation more than a decade ago has become one of the nation's most noted, and best studied, social policy experiments. The Foundation has published two major reports on this project, along with many volumes of mid-course documentation. A 110-page evaluation by the Center for the Study of Social Policy gave a close look at the positive and negative implications of the original five-year initiative. *The Path of Most Resistance*, the Foundation's own candid assessment of New Futures, was released in 1995 and has been widely distributed. The project has also been analyzed by scholars and journalists, written about in books, newspapers, magazines, academic journals, and public interest reports. Why then, 10 years after its inception, does the world need another document about New Futures?

The insights, on-the-ground experience, and advice of our partners in the New Futures cities have been enormously helpful to us throughout our long-term relationship. As we prepared to move into a new generation of work, we believed that returning to this rich resource would provide relevant, timely, and instructive guidance. We were not disappointed. These reflections about day-in, day-out implementation have deepened our understanding of what is needed in the design, support, and management of successful comprehensive change and community-building efforts. The field's enthusiastic response to *The Path of Most Resistance* suggests that practitioners in the field of community change are as eager as we are to learn from ongoing experiences. We are pleased to share *The Eye of the Storm* with others who are interested in learning from these insights.

As Savannah's Otis Johnson observed: *"What's missing in the field is the long-term, on-the-ground, trial-and-error practitioner's view of community building. Other documents don't give you enough knowledge about the nuts and*

bolts of doing the work." Little Rock's Don Crary told us: *"Too many publications leave the impression that this work is about good people coming together, and talking and planning and reaching consensus — and then good things just happen. But that bears absolutely no resemblance to my experience! This work is about struggle and conflict and advocacy, and we need documents that reflect what it feels like at the eye of the storm."*

And the challenges that faced New Futures' leaders in the early 1990s are still being met across America, wherever reformers are tackling the toughest obstacles to rebuilding urban communities. The panoply of issues that challenged New Futures cities — collaboration with diverse partners, relationships between funders and communities, reforming dysfunctional public systems, top-down vs. bottom-up strategies, the need for economic development, the role of evaluation and technical assistance — continue to shape the community-building field today. The limits of New Futures led some reformers to choose other entry points for their work. In a few places, leaders decided to target a single neighborhood, rather than work citywide. Others have pursued a bottom-up strategy, partnering with low-income community residents rather than starting with high-powered stakeholders. Still others have joined with churches, community development corporations, and neighborhood groups, rather than large public systems, trying to avoid "the path of most resistance" that New Futures walked.

But wherever they start, the best reform efforts wind up grappling with all the contradictions and complexities faced in the New Futures cities. Reformers committed to poor kids must sooner or later tackle big public systems. And they must do so because these systems simply have too much impact and significance in the lives of poor families to be ignored. Little Rock and Savannah offer wisdom about what it takes to work a complicated, multi-front reform strategy — the path of most resistance — balancing the demands of political leaders and low-income residents, service providers and community activists, business people and children, all at the same time.

We at the Casey Foundation are especially mindful of the voices from the field presented in this document, and the legacy of lessons they leave us with, as we prepare to tackle yet again the ongoing imperative of helping distressed communities rediscover and rebuild their capacity to support and strengthen

families. Over the next ten years, under an umbrella we are calling the Neighborhood Transformation/Family Development Initiative, the Casey Foundation will devote an increasing portion of its resources and attention to finding out what it takes to turn tough neighborhoods into thriving, family-supporting communities. As we embark upon this renewed enterprise, we are grateful to those who shared our prior journey along the path of most resistance, stayed with us through the eye of the storm, and help us now to face future endeavors with humbled conviction that the possibilities are worth the peril.

Douglas W. Nelson
President
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Introduction

In 1987 the Annie E. Casey Foundation invited ten medium-sized American cities to apply to be part of a $50 million venture called "New Futures." At a time when most funders and reformers were taking an incrementalist approach to the perplexing troubles of urban poverty, the growing Casey Foundation stepped out with a not-so-modest proposal: It would grant roughly $10 million apiece over five years to five cities that showed willingness and capacity to experiment with collaborative, comprehensive, public-private approaches to the multiple problems of "at-risk" children.

After a year-long planning and selection process, the Foundation chose five cities — Savannah, Georgia; Little Rock, Arkansas; Dayton, Ohio; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Lawrence, Massachusetts — as its partners. The sites set out to test the premise at the heart of New Futures: that strong political leadership, interagency collaboration, case management, and other comprehensive innovations could reduce teen pregnancy and school dropout rates and improve school achievement and youth employment rates in a five-year period.

That premise turned out to be wrong. None of the New Futures cities made such measurable improvements in five years. Just assembling the New Futures leadership collaborative proved an enormous political task. "Systems reform" was tougher still. New Futures projects got busy putting case managers in schools, setting up health clinics, promoting education reform, and developing school-to-work initiatives. But by getting involved with new services, however innovative, they left the public systems they were designed to change mostly intact. Less than two years into the process, leadership divisions led the city of Lawrence to withdraw from New Futures (it was replaced by Bridgeport, Connecticut). Pittsburgh's entire collaborative resigned in the third year. Tension with school leadership plagued Dayton and Savannah, while Little Rock struggled to bring its business community on board.

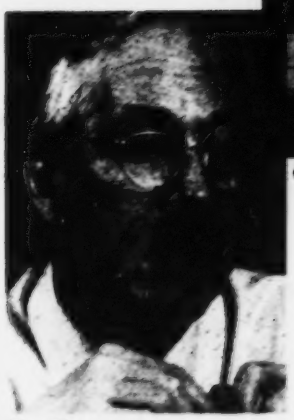
And yet the early frustrations of the New Futures cities held valuable lessons for the Casey Foundation, and the community-building field. Once the difficulties of the original design became apparent, Casey gave the cities greater freedom to experiment. The mid-course adjustment helped. At the end of the five-year project, while none of the sites achieved their original goals, evaluators found that all five had created respected "mediating structures to help break down the fragmented, categorical system of services," a necessary first step to renewed public systems that would truly strengthen at-risk children, families, and communities.

But two sites, Savannah and Little Rock, had done more: They had become lasting home-grown institutions for innovation and reform. The Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority (YFA) zeroed in on the city's poorest neighborhood, known as Area C, and built an array of community-based supports that included a family resource center to house a wide range of health and social services, along with social and cultural programming. New Futures for Little Rock Youth evolved into "a forum for community problem solving," evaluators found, helping the city pioneer a youth development strategy that brought new institutions — churches, businesses, neighborhood groups — into a realm that had been dominated by service providers.

Even after New Futures officially ended in 1994, the Casey Foundation acknowledged the lasting success of the Savannah and Little Rock sites by providing continued support — a recognition that reformers in Savannah and Little Rock were on a path to a new future, even if it was taking longer to get there than New Futures designers originally believed. Both projects continue to this day, with strong local support and much of their original leadership intact. *The Eye of the Storm* tells their story.

1

Otis Johnson



Don Crary

The New Futures Theory of Change

"You bring powerful people to the table, and they will push the systems to change."

As funders, practitioners, and evaluators try to understand the complicated world of comprehensive community-building initiatives, they have found it helpful to talk about a given project's "theory of change." That academic-sounding phrase is basically a way to ask, What is the project designed to accomplish, and how are its components intended to get it there?

The Casey Foundation's "theory of change" for New Futures was complex and simple at the same time. It assumed that improving prospects for low-income children and families required collaboration among the many agencies serving them — social services, health, schools, juvenile justice — and between those agency leaders and the political and business powers that be. Another underlying assumption held that involving a given city's "movers and shakers" — mayor, CEOs, school superintendents, along with corporate leaders and public agency heads — would create a strong political constituency for reform. Project designers also believed that collecting and publicizing good data from schools, health, and service agencies would create a shared picture of problems and lead to a common vision about what to do about them.

As they grappled with implementing that theory of change, New Futures leaders in individual cities discovered its power, its limits, and a paradox at the heart of its design. Casey President Douglas W. Nelson is frank about the major flaw in the New Futures design: "We all assumed that somebody somewhere knew what a comprehensive, community-based integrated support system really looked like," Nelson recalls. "And we were wrong."

And though the Foundation tried to encourage innovation and flexibility in its partner cities, it also prescribed certain notions about interventions, including case management, school clinics, and youth employment efforts. So while its ultimate goal was systems reform, New Futures seemed to encourage cities to reach that goal by working programmatically and sponsoring services — a paradox that side-tracked the cities into a service strategy, and slowed their progress toward the goal of systems reform.

Don Crary: The Casey Foundation said, "We want a table created in which the school superintendent and the child welfare administrator and the mayor and the business leaders all sit down regularly and look at what's going on with kids, and take ownership to design new systems and reconfigure the way dollars are spent." There wasn't a city in the country with a table where that was happening. So Casey looked for cities where there was a willingness to form a table and be candid with each other, and where people were willing, in spite of the tension, to keep coming back to the table, because the goals were important. I know they saw more candor in Little Rock than in some of the other cities.

Otis Johnson: Same in Savannah. We really laid out our dirty laundry in the proposal. And we consciously said, we wanted movers and shakers for this project. If this was going to be about systemic change, this is who we need, and that's who we went after. The Foundation wanted a collaborative of people who could make decisions about changes, who had the power and the resources to make those changes happen, and that's what we went for.

Don: The theory behind the original design of the collaborative was that you bring powerful people to the table, and they will push the systems to change. And it happened in a few cases. Take the example of school suspensions, which were way too high. For schools, suspension seems like an answer — it gets troublemakers out of the classroom. But to the mayor and the police chief at that table, it's not an answer — to put kids out of school on to the streets. And so they began to pressure the schools to change.

Otis: School health clinics were another example where the collaborative worked. In almost all the cities, they were very controversial — especially in

Savannah, because we wanted to include reproductive health. But the collaboratives stood up to the opposition. And what turned out to be really important about the clinics was all the other kinds of health care and health screening, for diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma. Having the collaborative stand up for the clinics, against very vocal opposition, might have been our proudest moment.

And yet we found limits to our strategy, right away. School districts, for instance, have an independent revenue source, and an independent governance structure. They can thumb their noses at collaboration, and often do. It takes an enormous amount of public exposure and political and moral persuasion to move a school district. Ultimately, it took us years.

Don: With all the big leaders there's a culture of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Part of the flaw was expecting them to hold each other accountable. School superintendents actually have a lot in common with the mayor and the city manager and public agency leaders, all of whom depend on the public perception that things are going well and there are good people in charge. It's very unlikely the mayor is going to oppose a school bond measure, for instance, because the school board and the superintendent aren't doing a good job. Because next year, he'll be going after his bond issue, and he'll need their support. They tend to rally around each other more than criticize. So it wasn't enough to have the movers and shakers. It wasn't the voice of the community.

"With all the big leaders there's a culture of 'you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.' Part of the flaw was expecting them to hold each other accountable." —Don Crary

Otis: But it was the right place to start. No question about it. Savannah really required a top-down strategy in the beginning. There was no effort to say, "Well, we're going to get Mary Jane and Joe out of the neighborhood," because we wanted people who could control resources. Now we are building bottom-up to meet the top, working with our residents, to bring them into the process. And we're working with the mid-level agency managers, so we will have that complete continuum of involvement. But in Savannah, had you started talking about a grassroots movement at the outset, well, we wouldn't be here today, having this conversation. It would have been as simple as that.

Joan Walsh: Were you entirely clear about what you were embarking on with New Futures?

Don: No, and I don't think Casey was entirely clear, either. On the one hand, Casey sent the message, "This is about systems change." But then on the other hand, they gave us a guidebook for our proposals that seemed to be saying "You must have case management," which is clearly direct service. "You should have a youth employability system," which usually meant new services. "And you've got to reach these benchmarks: You must decrease dropouts by X percent, and teen pregnancies by Y percent, and something else by this percent over these five years. And here's this enormous amount of money." So they give you the money, and they say "Impact those numbers." And you set up clinics, you set up education, you set up case management, you do certain services that will impact numbers. But this wasn't really systems change. Systems change is a much more time-consuming process.

Otis: I think some of the proposal reviewers understood that contradiction. The person who reviewed the Savannah proposal said, "My God, there's nothing new in this plan. These are just add-on activities to what's already happening." They felt that it wouldn't bring any systemic change. And it didn't. Not that plan. But the only way we could get the players to play was to take what they were offering to do, with the unstated mission of pushing them once the game got started. But if we had pushed too hard in the beginning, there wouldn't have been a game to play.

Joan: What about the time frame: Did you think you could make a difference in five years?

Otis: We were naive enough to think that. I admit it. Five years seemed to be a long time. Because the frame of reference was that three-year grants were long-term grants in '87. Of course the problems were more complex, and deeper than we knew about or could have anticipated.

Don: Exactly. I had seen all the data there was to see about kids in our state. But I was shocked, when we actually started working with real kids, at the magnitude of the problems in their lives. When you go through a KIDS COUNT

book and see all the different problems for youth, what you don't understand is that about six of those things are taking place in about three years in one kid's life. You meet these kids and you hear these stories and you think, "How are you even surviving?"

Otis: But also, New Futures was a service strategy — a strategy to reform service systems. And I think we learned that services aren't really at the core of how kids survive, much less thrive.

"We learned that services aren't really at the core of how kids survive, much less thrive." —Otis Johnson

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What they learned:

- Measurable improvements in the lives of at-risk children can't be achieved in five years.
- A top-down strategy has its limits — agency leaders may protect one another, rather than hold each other accountable.
- Creating innovative new services won't by itself reform public systems.
- Systems reform requires participation — and pressure — from the broader community.

2

The Key Insight

"Systems reform is about changing relationships."

As the collaboratives matured, they came up against some of the limits of the New Futures design. All the cities relied heavily on case management as the vehicle for service integration and the entry point for systems change. Case managers were expected to link youth and families to services, while being the eyes and ears of the collaborative, alerting New Futures leaders to systems change possibilities. It didn't work as planned. Case managers discovered that existing services didn't meet kids' needs, schools saw them as meddlers, not allies, and the collaboratives didn't have a strategy to address racism, which was a problem in both schools and services.

But the case managers alerted New Futures leaders to problems and opportunities that shaped the next phase of the initiative. And the best case managers were able to make a difference with the youth they served, despite the inadequacy of services and the problems of schools — the relationship itself, between a caring adult and a middle-school youth, turned out to be transformative. Those examples, and others, helped the collaboratives see that relationships, not services, were what helped low-income kids survive.

When the Foundation saw the struggles being experienced by the sites, it asked for "Second Phase Plans" that would address those troubles. Savannah and Little Rock decided to reorient their work to focus on strengthening relationships, neighborhood, and community, rather than just working in schools and reforming services. But they didn't abandon their systems reform focus, Don Crary notes. "Families have real needs, and systems have real money."

Don: Within a year or two we were struggling in Little Rock. We began to feel that no matter how many services we provided, we were never going to change outcomes for a serious number of these kids. Our case managers began to bring us that message very early on. Their job was to refer young people to services, and from the beginning they weren't referring much. They found there wasn't much out there to refer kids to. Most services weren't culturally sensitive, and most were about "treatment," and the case managers did not see that as what these kids needed. They didn't need to go to some institution for a month or two. They also began to surface the racism in the schools. Their biggest struggle was keeping quiet when they watched teachers bait students, who would wind up suspended and expelled. They showed us all the ways the schools were failing African-American kids.

But the interesting thing was, the case managers were still very effective working with kids. They were doing what an aunt, a big brother, an uncle, or a parent would do. And they were having an impact. So we began to see that where services had an impact, it's in the relationship they foster between people. You take schools, you take service agencies, you take any institution, what matters is the interaction between two people, teacher and child, worker and client. And when there's improvement, it usually isn't that the services *per se* were different, it's about a change in the person who delivered the service, and the way they delivered it. It became clear to us that systems change meant changing the interactions between those two people in all the systems. That is a very different and difficult agenda.

"Case managers were effective working with kids because they did what an aunt, a big brother, an uncle, or a parent would do." —Don Crary

Otis: We had the same experience. Where our case managers did find good services, there were long waiting lists. And in the schools, they were not seen as helpers but as people who were meddling, taking the side of the students against the teachers. That's part of why we came out of the schools as a primary point of work and went into the neighborhood. I think case managers helped us see that you can service the immediate needs of a family or a student but unless you get down to what's causing that need, the need keeps coming back. I should also say that data was crucial in helping us see where the problems were, and where we needed to have a bigger impact. All the

problems were concentrated in Area C, so the New Futures emphasis on data enabled us to argue that we needed to concentrate there.

But we had begun to see that systems reform is about changing relationships. And it goes all the way to the most fundamental relationship. When we talk about who gets prenatal care, it starts right there, with that relationship, and the decisions that mothers make. So it matters how a prenatal system is constructed — we have to get people out into the community to relate to those mothers, to encourage them to get into a program, to stay on their health regimen. In the schools, it's about the relationship between students and teachers. Systems reform has to enable teachers to interact more closely with kids, to let them spend the time, to say that those relationships matter.

So we said: "OK, we're going into the neighborhood, and we're going to work with parents. We're going to become family-centered and neighborhood-based." That's how the family resource center came into the strategy. We needed to be physically located in a neighborhood, where families can get their needs met, where empowering activities can take place, where we can start building social capital.

Don: We developed more of a neighborhood focus in Little Rock after a surge in youth violence and gang activity. At that point it became obvious to members of the collaborative that we couldn't be just about services, that we had to zero in on neighborhoods, the turf where the violence and gang activity was a problem. We needed a geographic component to our work, to focus on conditions in these neighborhoods, not just on the kids. Which was important in shifting the blame away from these "bad" kids, and toward the bad conditions that led to gangs and violence.

We began to try to learn from the way relationships happen naturally in communities — the way bonds form, and people help one another. I was impressed by the way some of the kids we worked with were informally mentoring other kids. I saw a young man named Marcus who was working with three or four young kids in his neighborhood; I mean, regularly, like a youth worker. Kids would come to him for tennis shoes or school supplies, and he'd find a way to give it to them. I thought, Now what would it take to imagine a system that actually could give Marcus the resources to just do that, in the

informal networking kind of way it's already happening, to support and enable him to take care of these kids?

Otis: Looking back, we should have been asking that from the beginning: What are the dynamics in kids' lives that help them survive? And we know: It's having a caring adult, it's being able to set some goals for themselves, it's having somebody help them navigate to reach those goals. So the question became: How do we take that knowledge, and try to support or create those informal community helping networks? Because that's what's going to help more kids survive.

"We should have been asking: What are the dynamics in kids' lives that help them survive?"
—Otis Johnson

Don: But we need to point out: Services, and systems, were not irrelevant to those goals. One milestone for us was back in May 1992, when the Casey, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations brought us together with other community-building projects, to talk about what we were learning. In Little Rock and Savannah, we were coming to see that systems reform was not going to accomplish what we wanted, that we had to get at changing conditions and opportunities in the neighborhoods. And the Cleveland meeting reinforced that. But in Cleveland we could also see that the projects which hadn't been as systems-oriented and service-minded were struggling to engage the systems and services, because families have real needs, and the systems have real money. And where we had started with a very top-down collaborative model, we met people at the meeting who had started at the neighborhood level, and they were now struggling with: How do we leverage money? How do we get attention from those at the top? Questions we had already answered, at least to some extent. So it was clear we didn't abandon our agenda — we had to do both. We had to work in the neighborhoods and work at the system level. Work with the movers and shakers, and work with the residents. We had to be the bridge between those sectors.

What they learned:

- New Futures placed too many divergent expectations on case managers.
- Good case managers demonstrated that what many kids needed was a strong bond with a caring adult.
- Systems reform must begin to put resources behind an agenda of supporting and catalyzing those natural caring relationships.
- The work requires a geographic framework, so reformers can think about how to use systems to strengthen the natural helping institutions in a neighborhood.

3

Capacity Building

"This is our work."

The insight that community institutions and residents needed to develop their ability to sustain the connections and social bonds that help kids survive was a critical milestone in New Futures. But it didn't lead to an obvious action agenda. Over time Savannah and Little Rock groped toward describing what kinds of capacity were needed to do the work, and how they could help develop it in their community partners.

Savannah zeroed in on a low-income, mainly African-American neighborhood, known as Area C, and built a Family Resource Center, to house state-of-the-art health and social services as well as sports, theater, and community events. It experimented with ways to tap the power of residents, enlisting them to serve on the Resource Center's advisory council, to mentor young mothers and other parents under stress, and to work with neighborhood youth. In Little Rock, rising concern about youth problems led the city to pass a half-cent sales tax increase, and New Futures was able to help steer those funds toward some community groups that got beyond traditional service provision and took a neighborhood focus.

Collaboratives in both cities began to see their goal as "capacity building," an agenda that required just as much trial-and-error experimentation as the previous goal of "systems reform" — but with a bigger potential payoff. There have been some significant systems impacts: Savannah's work creating a "Family to Family" intervention program, linking stressed parents at risk of losing their kids to foster care with friends and neighbors who have stronger parenting skills, has dramatically reduced foster care placements in Area C and is becoming a model for the nation. "We see our role as strengthening social networks," Otis Johnson says.

Don: Once we moved away from services, we saw that our role was not to do the work, but to support the capacity of other agencies and partners to do it. We realized that this is our work — capacity building — and then the questions became: How do we help people in the community do this work? How can we generate more capacity? In what role will we be welcomed by the community? And how do we get beyond the usual suspects — the service providers — and find others who want to make a difference for kids, who don't necessarily have a track record in that area?

Otis: We wanted to find the expertise that's inside the community — the people who were the foundation of these communities before the so-called "experts" came in and professionalized helping and undercut the natural social networks. We're looking for the people who have what we call "motherwit," who put their noses into other people's business, who watch out for the children. These are people who, with additional training and resources, can be very powerful.

Joan: How do you shift the incentives and the funding to let community people and informal support networks do some of the work "professionals" have done?

Otis: In Savannah we've really brought those people into our system. We started a Family to Family program, with Casey funds, that links families who might lose their kids to foster care with neighbors who can help them cope better. We have Resource Mothers, who help the younger mothers in the neighborhood when they need it. We work with the women you might call "busybodies," who watch all the houses, who know when somebody's in trouble, or about to be. We came to see our role as strengthening natural social networks. And we're finding that it works. The Family to Family mentoring program has reduced foster care placements dramatically. We're figuring out ways to spread these learnings throughout the system.

"We came to see our role as strengthening natural social networks."
—Otis Johnson

Don: One thing we did early on, to get a sense of who was out there trying to work with kids besides traditional service providers, was give out $6,000-$10,000 mini-grants, based on a two-page-tell-us-what-you-want-to-do-

good-for-kids kind of proposal. Just so we could get out there and get to know some different people and organizations. The money was probably not much help to the organizations, because the grants were so small. But it was a way to engage with the community and get a better sense of what the capacity was. Did certain organizations have a strong enough base to take on more work with youth? Was there a way for us to help them develop more capacity? We needed to figure out: In what role would we be useful to the community? Our whole management staff got involved. Individuals were assigned to work with different groups, and it turned out to be a great way to get the management team out into the community in conversation with organizations.

Then, when the city passed its half-cent sales tax, they turned to us to help shape what kinds of youth programs should be funded. They asked for advice in crafting a request for proposals, and based on our mini-grant experience we had a notion of how to write it to get the funds to some different kinds of neighborhood organizations. Applicants had to show how kids would have access to a caring, consistent adult through their program; how they would get opportunities to gain new skills, try new things, and make contributions to their community. It wasn't about services, it was about activities a community group could do with kids in their neighborhood. It made them competitive with those service providers who have been around for 15 years and know how to get that grant money. We found some wonderful people working, often informally, at the community level. One is an entrepreneur, a young black man, who ran an African-oriented bookstore/art store, and did a lot of stuff with kids through the public libraries and schools. When our proposal came out, he paired up with a church in downtown Little Rock to run an after-school and weekends program for kids. And we funded two public housing residents' councils to work with kids, who never would have been funded before.

Then we got a contract from the city to do training and technical assistance and support and monitoring with the funded organizations — everything from, What's a board? Do you need one? To basic things like setting up accounting systems, planning, and proposal writing. Just basic organizational development. We worked with them on hiring, to figure out what kind of worker they needed, then training them, getting support. Now we do data

collection across the sites and continue to facilitate training and problem solving.

Otis: We've done a lot of work with the advisory council for our Family Resource Center. First we went out there and organized the council, because there wasn't any kind of authentic grassroots organization capable of planning for the Center. We asked them to help us think about what services and activities it should provide, and we told them we wanted to get to the point where they would control it. But we're talking about managing a half-million dollar activity, and we knew they would need some capacity building to learn how to do that. So we created a series of workshops and technical assistance activities, to let them talk about their own development as a nonprofit board, the skills and knowledge base they need to manage something like that.

We also developed our own mini-grants program, where the advisory council could award small grants to neighborhood groups and nonprofits to do little short-term projects, at the Center, with the young people in the neighborhood. So far, we've been very pleased with the way they managed the mini-grants: the way they developed the RFP, sent it out, evaluated the proposals, awarded the grants, how they're monitoring them. This program is to help this group begin to learn the whole process of managing an institution like the Center.

Don: Building political capacity has been important, too. It's not enough to teach them about good program management and professional youth development work. You need to talk about bureaucratic and political processes. You can't just operate on the assumption that "the good guy wins" and if you're a good guy that's going to be enough to take care of you. We try to help people see how you structure a board that gives you some political clout, for instance.

Otis: I think we're also trying to get the power structure to realize that just because some of these community groups might fail, it doesn't mean the money has been wasted. I mean, nobody says we should stop funding the police department because crime hasn't been eliminated, or we have some corrupt cops.

Don: Clearly, we have had to build the city's capacity in this process — their capacity to deal with different kinds of neighborhood groups and CBOs that are out of their experience, and their capacity to judge success when they're doing more than just providing services. We've served as a buffer between the city's attorneys and finance people, on the one hand, and these struggling community groups who aren't necessarily used to the bureaucracy and the monitoring requirements that getting city funding requires.

Joan: How would you describe capacity-building leadership?

Otis: You are the keeper of the flame, the standard bearer. But you also have to be able to be the bridge between groups and ideas. You have to be comfortable with surfacing conflict, and community anger, but you also have to be a conciliator.

"We've had to build the city's capacity to deal with different kinds of neighborhood groups and CBOs that are out of their experience." —Don Crary

Don: In the long run, what you want in this work is that all sectors of the community find their role in the change process. You spend a lot of time looking: Who are the potential leaders in different sectors? Who can take this new message and spread it in an effective way, and be heard in the business community, among nonprofit providers, in the various neighborhoods, in city government, and state government? And how do you help them find opportunities, and feel comfortable taking on that leadership role? I am convinced that the key leadership skill we need is the ability to recognize leadership in all those sectors, and to facilitate it and empower it and build it. The best leaders are really translators — taking the same message to different groups in ways they can understand it.

But I don't want to underestimate the importance of risk-taking, either. You want leadership that helps groups reach consensus, but you also need to act sometimes when there's no consensus to be reached, and somebody's got to take a tough stand to move your agenda forward.

What they learned:

- Status quo funding requirements favor traditional service providers, and advocates for change need to get out into the community to see what exists, and what's needed.
- Mini-grants were a way to cultivate new providers — investing small amounts of money to see if new groups could expand their missions to work with youth.
- Community residents and nontraditional service organizations will need a range of technical assistance to mount new activities and manage public funds.
- Public agencies interested in strengthening natural support systems need to learn how to nurture and monitor fledgling community-based efforts.

4

Race, Class and Culture

"Can a white person get this job?"

New Futures did not start out with an explicit focus on race. Although child poverty is highest in communities of color, the Casey Foundation did not prescribe any particular approach or attitude toward the barriers raised by race, or how to eradicate them. Its selection criteria did favor cities that seemed ready to acknowledge the centrality of race in the issue of urban poverty, and Little Rock and Savannah were among the strongest contenders. But from the beginning of New Futures race posed a challenge to each individual city's leadership and the Foundation.

Key to the New Futures strategy was a belief that strong data would lift racial differences into sharp relief, forcing collaboratives to grapple with what to do about them. And indeed, Savannah and Little Rock found that data painted a clear picture of the gaps between white and black families on nearly every front, from school achievement to infant mortality to income. But handling such troubling data required comfort with racial differences that rarely comes naturally.

"The sheer lack of experience that most people have in dealing across racial, class, and cultural lines was as pervasive on most of the collaborative governing boards as in the community at large," the Casey Foundation concluded in *The Path of Most Resistance*. "Frankly, the Foundation did not appreciate or emphasize the importance of these challenges in its early guidance to New Futures cities."

Both Little Rock and Savannah grappled with achieving the right racial balance on their collaboratives, and on their staffs, in both management and frontline positions. A multiracial leadership group proved to be critical in both cities. They found that race mattered, but not always in predictable ways, and progress required sophistication and flexibility in marshaling support for new strategies across race and class lines.

"We wanted the movers and shakers, and it just so happened that the movers and shakers in Savannah are white men." —Otis Johnson

Otis: Race was an issue from the very beginning with New Futures. In assembling the planning group, we wanted the movers and shakers, and it just so happened that the movers and shakers in Savannah are white men. So the mayor got the letter from Casey inviting him to apply, and the superintendent of schools got the letter. White men. The city manager went out and brought in the captains of industry, and the head of the United Way, the heads of the public agencies — all white men. So when you assembled, you had a bunch of white men. I was asked to serve on the planning group because I was on the city council and I was also a professor of social work, so I was a natural to represent those two sectors. But you had a very white, elite group grappling with the problems of mainly poor black people. Now, they were thoughtful, sensitive, well-intentioned people, and I think they realized the problem with that. It's no doubt part of why they hired me as director.

Don: We had the same dynamic in Little Rock. Sometimes, I look back and think, I might not apply for the director's job again. I didn't apply until they'd gone through one round of interviews, and I told them I felt they should hire an African American. My being white has influenced the way New Futures is perceived by the black community in really significant ways — in terms of building connection and a sense of trust. It was clear we needed top-level, strong African-American staff in visible decision-making positions in the agency.

Otis: I've had a different challenge, being black. When I looked for a number two person, I wanted a racial mix, and I hoped to find a sensitive, talented person who could do the work, and who happened to be white. I was

lucky to find her in Gaye Smith, who was at the United Way during our planning process, so I knew her skills and her temperament. In other positions, I thought it was important to have African Americans. When we were about to open the Family Resource Center, I went to Marvin Lloyd — a strong African-American man with a gentle spirit. I knew he didn't have administrative experience, but he had the right attitude and I thought I could help him learn to do what he needed to do. And so I approached him and asked him to think about it, and meanwhile we advertised for the job. But the applicants we got weren't as good as Marvin. So we drew up a contract with him, and then I gave him a big stack of books and said, "That's your homework." And it's worked out fine.

Don: But if you hadn't known him, how would you find him? How would you write an ad that would allow you, in an objective way, to hire a center administrator with no administrative experience, knowing you will get lots of applicants who will come to you with 10 and 12 and 15 years of administrative experience? That's the dilemma I had at the very beginning of New Futures. I knew we needed top-level administrative staff who were African Americans. But I learned early how the glass ceiling works. When I was hiring for management positions I got 400 resumes. And I sat one weekend reading through them, and realized I'd have to consider much more than "objective qualifications" if I was going to have black management-level staff. Because the glass ceiling was so obvious. You'd take these resumes and watch two people come out of school with bachelor's degrees, one white, one black. Both go to work, both get master's degrees, but as you went up the ladder and there were fewer positions, whites tended to get them. So when you looked at who had the most management experience, it was almost always the white candidates. It's what's called "institutional racism" at work.

In one tough situation, two candidates applied for a major administrative job. One, a black woman, very well known in the community, had just finished her MSW. She'd run some small grassroots community-based projects around teen pregnancy, and went back to get her master's degree late. The other candidate was a white MSW out of school probably 15 years, with years of administrative and supervisory experience. And I hired the African-

American woman. And the white woman — a wonderful woman I'd known for years — called me up and we went to lunch and she said, "I really want to talk about this, because I need to think about doing some other kind of work, if it's the judgment of somebody I respect that this isn't work that a white person can do." I said, "I think it's work you can do, but in this case it would have been tough!" Because I needed someone who parents and kids knew and tended to trust until they prove otherwise, not someone who had to gain that trust. We didn't have the time for that. And since then on several occasions people have asked "Can a white person get this job?" and I've had to say "Of course." But they have to be exceptional and it takes longer to establish trust and community relationships.

"People have asked 'Can a white person get this job?' and I've had to say 'Of course.' But they have to be exceptional and it takes longer to establish trust and community relationships." —Don Crary

Otis: Some of us want to believe that race and ethnicity are not as important as they are in this society. But when we start talking about capacity development and in-service training, we're going to have to be very frank about the important role of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, if we want to be good at serving the needs of certain populations. We've got to make that a critical factor, in who the workers are.

On the other hand, you can certainly see in the educational system that there are whites who do an excellent job working with blacks, while some of the most ineffective and negative teachers are African Americans, interacting with African-American children, because they bring all the stereotypes and their own problems and their own failed expectations of themselves.

So, color is one factor but it's not the only factor. In terms of sensitivity, I would put some white people ahead of certain African Americans, who are so detached from the low-income community they miss the whole point of our work. It's what's in the person. As many of us say, "Black is a state of mind." And Don, I would say that you're a little too hard on yourself about being white. You had the skills to do the work. Being black would have been a bonus, but it's not a necessary precondition for this kind of leadership. Because you've done the job that was needed.

Don: I've also come to see the enormous burden we put on black people in doing this work, the way we say, "Come and represent your community, and

explain all of this, and figure out how to make us hear you. Come tell us things that we should know already."

Joan: What kinds of things should we know already?

Don: Oh, the way the African-American community perceives the police — that they're not just out to protect them. Or the place of the church in the black community. Or why people might get upset, like they did in Little Rock, when they hear that four white men met privately for breakfast before a supposedly public collaborative meeting, just to talk about some stuff that's on the agenda. Just the degree to which our institutional processes incorporate so much racism.

Joan: Were there any advantages, as executive director, to your being white?

Don: I got to go to some of those breakfast meetings with the four white men before the meeting at night *(laughs)!* Sometimes I think, would the people on the collaborative have worked as well with a black director to make it successful? I tend to think so, but I don't know.

Otis: I think we need leaders that, whatever their race, are skilled in being a diplomat to other communities. One thing I've tried to do in Savannah is be a diplomat to the white community, to try to help them understand the black community's reality. I think white people have a psychological defense mechanism about taking in how bad things are in poor black communities. If you have too many things that you think you can't have any impact on, then it shatters your image of your ability to control your life. There is a level of that at work, and then I think there's just simply a level of racism, and I have to differentiate between the two when I'm talking to folk. Are you a caring person who is sheltering yourself from this harsh reality — it's a way to keep sane — or do you just believe that these people don't deserve any better? Now that's very different, and part of my engaging with white people is to discern which one of those things is at work, because I have to know.

Joan: How do you discern it?

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Otis: Well, being black for 54 years kind of helps *(laughs)*. I've lived around white people all my life, I've studied them, it's like W.E.B. DuBois says, I have that sense of "twoness."

Joan: How can you help the wider community to see how bad things are?

Don: Probably the closest we came was in the work around youth violence, working with some of the kids who were in gangs. We would take members of the collaborative to some of the youth programs — just informally, one or two of them sitting around with some kids, asking questions and talking and listening. And these kids just tell it the way it is, and it's very moving. So they'd sit there and say, "Well, I never gave any thought to being part of these gangs, but then my cousin came over, we walked up to the store, and he got shot by these older guys. And the only way I could figure out not to get shot like he got shot, was to join up." Well, this was an incredible thing, for some of the white community leaders to perceive that kids can't leave home and walk to the corner store and walk back. That a gang equals, not danger, but safety.

I remember people really got the contrast between those stories, and what their own kids' lives were like, and the difference was so enormous. One of the kids we work with had a rap he did about "the killing fields," which was his neighborhood, right smack in the middle of Little Rock. And the refrain of it was, "Life in the Killing Fields, I thought you knew." How could we not know? The perception of these kids was that it's just indifference, that we don't care that's what's happening in their neighborhood. It can't possibly be that we don't know that's what's going on. And I watched the collaborative members take that in.

Otis: Most white folk don't think they have to pay attention to the reality of black folk.

Don: The other remarkable tendency white people have is to believe that we can solve it if it's going to be solved. But community building recognizes that in fact we can't solve it; that the solutions lie in the community, and institutions need to transfer authority and resources there to allow them to do that. That is an enormous leap for white people.

What they learned:

- Strong, high-level black leadership was a critical asset in winning support and trust from low-income black residents.
- Comfort and experience in the community may be as important as training and work experience in choosing successful project staff.
- Race is not the only factor in picking strong staff — both projects benefited from a racially mixed group of sensitive, committed reformers.
- Leaders of all races need to know how to cross racial lines and be "diplomats" to other communities.

5

The Funder's Role

"Acknowledge the power issues up front."

Major foundation initiatives are always by their nature a partnership, between a funder with an idea — a theory of change, if you will — and a practitioner willing to adapt it to local conditions and test it out. That partnership requires flexibility and compromise on both sides. New Futures cities were frank with their concerns about the difficulties of implementing the Casey plan locally — and with their praise for the Foundation's comparative flexibility in adapting to local conditions.

In every city, Casey's average commitment of $10 million over five years was crucial to creating local buy in, and leveraging local financial support. Savannah matched the $10 million, and Little Rock, which got $7.5 million, added approximately another $10 million. The large commitment of money up front gave the collaboratives freedom to experiment with new approaches. Yet it was a huge challenge to maintain local control and tailor a national design to local conditions. Every city grappled with the paradox of trying to think comprehensively in a service-specific world, and they got little help from the world of outside technical assistance (TA) consultants, who are trained in the existing categories — school reform, teen pregnancy, health, youth employment — that have long dominated family services. Midway through the project, the Foundation gave the sites their own technical assistance budget, letting them purchase the help they thought they needed.

Ultimately, Little Rock and Savannah found that coaching from Foundation staff and peer support from other New Futures cities — and the community-building field nationwide — were the best help in dealing with the tough political work their agenda entailed.

Otis: Casey's investment gave our work enormous credibility. It said to our partners: Casey is investing in Savannah based on our willingness to invest in these issues ourselves. They had to keep the money in, and they had to keep coming to the table. And we used Casey along the way to raise tough issues with certain local partners that we hadn't been able to get a response on.

"We used Casey along the way to raise tough issues with certain local partners that we hadn't been able to get a response on." —Otis Johnson

Don: And yet, from the beginning there was tension: Was New Futures the individual city's initiative, or was it Casey's? The Foundation had talked about finding five cities that were willing to take risks and look for answers and struggle honestly to come up with what needed to happen to improve outcomes for kids. A lot of the energy and excitement to apply came from that sense: "The community's going to come together and struggle and look for answers." But then, when the Foundation awarded the grants, it became very prescriptive: "Here are the 15 people who must be sitting at the table. And there ought to be a CEO, or you're in trouble." They had specific components they wanted us to work in: data analysis; youth employability; adolescent health and teen pregnancy prevention; educational reform; case management. And they had TA providers for every component, as well as evaluation people attached to them. So in come the evaluators and the TA people, who have all been given the script by which to judge what was happening. They'd ask: When are you going to get your case managers hired, what schools are you going to work in, and when are you going to add the CEO to the board?

So we would go to meetings with Casey, and we would say, If this is about your having a model and paying five cities to test it out, then tell us that. Don't keep telling us this is our initiative. To the Foundation's credit, they really did say — eventually — that it wasn't about a model. And they gave us more flexibility.

Otis: The lesson for me is to acknowledge the power issues up front. I remember it came to a head at a retreat, pretty early on in the initiative, when we had a dialogue with Casey about whether or not we were equal partners. One night after dinner we had a rather heated exchange, and a Casey executive told us flat out: "OK, this *isn't* an equal partnership!" And it actually

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helped *(laughs)*. Because we no longer had any illusions. We may be partners but we were not *equal* partners. But foundations have to recognize that local communities have something that foundations need — it's not just that foundations have something local communities need. There has to be compromise.

Specifically, I think funders need to engage sites in the selection of the TA and evaluation consultants. Because neither TA nor evaluation is a neutral enterprise, and a wrong personality asking questions or giving advice can be devastating to a local community. Early in New Futures, it was very hard. The evaluators would expect to write reports and then have a meeting in Savannah where they would present their findings publicly and discuss them. Sometimes they didn't understand how political it all was.

Don: I don't think the TA providers and the evaluators understood that the moment they walked into town, they affected the politics. Some evaluators didn't really understand the impact of their reports. I mean, when you get that big a grant, there's always someone, no matter how well you've built support, who thinks that money should have gone somewhere else. Or someone who really resists the changes you're pushing for. Take the schools. When you're trying to make change in a bureaucracy like the schools, clearly you have an enormous number of people who don't want to make that change. They don't want to shift to middle schools, or they don't want to do team teaching. Whatever. Well, then you get an evaluators' report talking about how this or that school reform isn't making an impact yet, and it's like fuel to the fire of people who already opposed you.

Plus, the TA was not the kind of TA we needed. We got TA on programmatic things: teen health, youth employment, school reform, but ours was really a political agenda, and we needed different skills: How do you build a collaborative process? What kind of people should you hire to do this work? Then we were always grappling with how do you build leadership across communities, what are the negotiating skills you need, the consensus organizing skills. I remember thinking, it seems like we're constantly meeting with people, negotiating about when you're going to deliver this, how decisions get made. Those are the skills we need help with. Or how do you manage conflict on a collaborative? How do you allow the anger that exists between community

people and bureaucrats to surface, but not explode. Because when you put issues on the table it brings back a lot of history, and a lot of history that isn't good. People's feelings start coming out, along with the facts.

Or another example: hiring. I was committed to an open hiring process, because there are so rarely good jobs like this in Little Rock. But in retrospect, I wish I'd known enough to have hired at least one or two people that I knew and had already worked with. Because you need someone you trust as you begin to do this work. On the other hand, you really need to think about the racial and class and professional balance we already talked about. So what we were grappling with was just so different from what we were spending millions of dollars on for TA.

"We got TA on programmatic things, but we needed different skills: How do you a build a collaborative process? What kind of people should you hire?" —Don Crary

Otis: No question about it. The training and the technical assistance is really not there, because honestly, there are not a whole lot of folk who've been through this, at the magnitude that we've been through it, with the expectation of putting all of these diverse segments together into something whole.

Joan: Where did you go for help and advice?

Otis: Actually, our Casey site managers were the most help. The TA was designed for the service strategy and what we found in the site managers were individuals who could help us with the political agenda and the advocacy piece. They did whatever was necessary — coaching, cajoling, hand-holding; playing good-guy or bad-guy with our collaborative partners. They understood the political nature of the work.

Don: And they really spent time in the city — two or three days almost every month for years. I think Casey's ability to make significant midcourse corrections — about how TA dollars were handled, what flexibility in planning the sites were going to be given, how to rethink what they were expecting in the way of outcomes for judging success — I think all of that probably would not have happened had they not had staff who were so deeply immersed in the community and understood them so well. Ultimately, Casey gave the sites the money they were spending to purchase TA, and said *"You* decide what you need, and pay for it with this." That was very important.

We also got a lot out of the cross-site meetings Casey sponsored to bring all five cities together. They'd bring together six to eight people from each site, sometimes for as long as a week. And you'd immerse people in discussions in a way you never could at home. Casey would bring in really good people to talk. But what was best was the support of knowing that other cities were facing the same problems and politics and struggle.

Otis: The best thing we did was in the second year, the five site directors began meeting by ourselves, about once a quarter, just for a day. They were my mental health support group. I could talk about issues that I had no one else to talk to about. And our meetings gave us the basis for ongoing consultation. We'd call each other up and say, "How are you dealing with this problem?" Or "How did you get cooperation from your school superintendent?" You need an affinity group when you're doing this kind of work.

Don: And the Cleveland meeting of what became the National Community Building Network — the Casey, Ford and Rockefeller Foundation projects — was invaluable. To see all these cities coming at this work from different perspectives, reaching similar conclusions, was incredibly helpful.

Otis: Absolutely. It was like, We thought we were orphans, but we found out we had family.

What they learned:

- Evaluation and technical assistance are not a "neutral enterprise;" strangers asking questions can cause problems in any city.
- New Futures provided insufficient technical assistance with the political components of the work.
- Foundation site managers who worked as coaches and allies, spending regular time in the five cities, were the best form of technical assistance the Foundation provided.
- Peer-to-peer learning and support was tremendously valuable for all site directors.

6

Measuring Progress

"The big outcomes weren't going to change within five years."

Everyone now agrees that expecting large measurable declines in teen pregnancy and school failure in just five years was unrealistic for an experimental, multifront, community-building project like New Futures. But in the community-building field, funders and practitioners alike are still grappling with how to assess their achievements in the absence of quantitative data.

The Casey Foundation adjusted its expectations in mid-project, recognizing that the successful New Futures cities were developing a community accountability structure that could make lasting change in the long run, even if it failed to get the short-term numerical outcomes the Foundation had hoped for. "We knew Savannah and Little Rock were making progress when we asked them for 'Second Half' New Futures plans, and they refused," recalls Miriam Shark, Casey Foundation Senior Associate. "They gave us 'Second Phase' plans instead, because they knew their work wasn't half-way completed, and they planned to maintain their collaboratives even once New Futures was over."

Savannah, in particular, continued to develop interagency strategies for systems reform. And finally, in year nine — four years after New Futures hoped to see success — it was able to report positive numerical outcomes. In 1996, the black teen birth rate had come down 12 percent in five years, black infant mortality was down 45 percent, foster care placements had declined 25 percent, and serious juvenile crime had dropped as well.

Joan: What do you consider your most significant achievements?

Don: I would start with the collaborative, having developed a broad cross-section of people that meets regularly with youth and families as the subject. Certainly that did not exist, and to have it sustained over that much time is really significant, and probably the basis for a lot of positive changes in the community. Then there was the tax initiative. To get new dollars dedicated to that kind of work was incredible. The mayor was eager to support the tax, and I think that had to do with his participation on the collaborative, his spending time with the kids and recognizing how important that use of dollars was. We had a lot to do with the youth initiative projects and the prevention-intervention treatment grants the city did. The city had never been involved in funding any kind of children and families services before New Futures. So clearly we moved youth issues way up on the public agenda.

Otis: In Savannah, we established a viable collaborative body, that now has worked out a consensus on what it is trying to achieve. We've started building a management information system that can collect data on the outcomes we've agreed to. We have the Family Resource Center, and we're trying to build a culture that goes beyond co-location, but models integrated service delivery at one site, with a central administration, where we have pooled staff. We are experimenting with a common intake form among the major public agencies in the community. We've got 15 schools that have volunteered to participate this school year in an initiative called the Community School Resource Team Initiative. We're where we wanted to be year one, and it's taken us eight years to get there. But we're there.

Joan: So what should funders be looking for? Let's take Savannah: In year one, Casey wanted you to go into the schools, but they wouldn't let you in. Now, nine years down the road, you're in the schools doing great stuff — schools are volunteering to work with you. Success story. You're seeing some positive numerical outcomes finally too. But what can you tell a funder about what Savannah looked like, in year three and four, that would justify their continuing to invest in Savannah to get to year nine?

Otis: I think Casey was able to look at Savannah and see the development of that collaborative, and the progress that we were making at getting folk to the table, and keeping them there. Then the way we were able to bring additional people to the table, especially during that second-phase planning process, when we cast our net wider. I think they saw by year three that a change process was unfolding, and the potential was there, and that gave them the willingness to continue on, although the big outcomes weren't changing. I think by that time they understood that those outcomes weren't going to change within five years.

Joan: OK, so it's the capacity to assemble a table, and add people to it. It's the capacity to change course. It's the capacity to challenge the Foundation when you realized you weren't going to make a difference *(laughs)!* To say, back to the Foundation, and to one another in your city, "This isn't working." It was a sign that Casey had invested in a community problem-solving apparatus, even if it didn't get the numerical outcomes.

Otis: I think we also need to get smarter about breaking down the problems we're trying to solve, and the outcomes we're trying to achieve. Casey should have looked at more specific risk factors for the problems it was trying to address. If you want to reduce teen pregnancy or dropout rates, you have to look at what happens before girls get pregnant, or boys drop out. You look at kids who are absent a lot, suspended a lot, scoring below the 25th percentile on standardized tests. And you zero in on that: You bring down suspensions, absenteeism, test scores below the 25th percentile. Those kinds of things are doable and measurable, and if you can't do them, you'll know soon enough.

Don: But I worry about tying our activities too much to numerical outcomes. The risk is that it drives you to do services, and use the existing professionals in the field to do it. They all sit down and figure out what to do, because they're the ones who are trained and knowledgeable in service delivery. I think this is a tough issue in the community-building field. On the one hand we say, "We need outcome evaluations of these projects." But we also say: "We need good solid, youth develop-

"I worry about tying our activities too much to numerical outcomes. The risk is that it drives you to do services, and use the existing professionals in the field to do it." —Don Crary

ment programs in the neighborhoods." But what is youth development? It's giving kids what they need to grow up and keep progressing. It's what we want for our own kids. Our focus on outcomes can lead to judging programs by whether they reduce school absenteeism, or delinquency, or dropping out, when sometimes that isn't the point. I was in this meeting where they were explaining outcomes evaluation to youth program people, and someone said, "Well, we teach kids to play baseball, but I don't know if that's going to work as an outcome." It seemed funny at the time, that a program might submit something like, "The kids learn to play baseball" as an outcome. But that's what they do, and it's what parents want. What's wrong with that?

Otis: Nothing. I think community building is about making a case that there's a whole tier of activities for kids that we're going to evaluate simply based on: Is it fun, is it safe, do kids vote with their feet and show up? Are there caring, responsible adults involved?

Don: So I think that even if you're looking at numerical outcomes, you have to look at process. Who's at the table discussing what the outcomes should be? Is it a more diverse group of people than when you began? Is it more than providers? And are providers and other professionals now engaged in honest dialogue with recipients and neighborhood people about why things aren't working? Is there a growing sense of common understanding about what the problems are and what has to happen? If you come visit me and then you visit the mayor, and then you visit the head of the social service department, will you see some common perspectives? Do you begin to hear recognition that systemic change must occur, or do you continue to hear "We need an alternative school" or "We need another kind of add-on program," which represents an inability on the part of decisionmakers to own up to the fact that fundamental systems change is required. And do you begin to see the big dollars flow differently — which I'm not ready to be judged on yet, but you'd like to see it happen!

Another benchmark of strength is a project's willingness to take on controversial issues. Funders should ask: Is it a collaborative that continues to ask tough questions about what we have to do to get better outcomes for kids? And if they're not seeing the outcomes, is it a collaborative that just keeps

beating a dead horse, or dissolves into infighting? Or does it say, we gotta go another way. If we've got a superintendent and school board who can only fight with each other right now, then we're not going to make headway in the public schools, so let's move on in other directions, knowing that we're going to come back to the schools. Because we're not going away.

Otis: I would add one thing: that you see a significant change in the way the community thinks about and deals with race. I know in Savannah, I work along side many individuals who never dealt with blacks as equals until they got into this process. And I have seen growth in them and I know for some of them, it has fundamentally changed them. And it has changed the city.

Don: I think that's true in Little Rock, too. You can't have a discussion about social services or schools or families and not have representation from the African-American community. Nine years ago, you would have meetings like that and it could easily be all white people. I think that's significant. That, to me, is a system change.

Joan: What is your biggest disappointment?

Otis: I would have to say one of them is the failure of the business community to help us much in the way of jobs. We had something called the Savannah Compact, which was an effort to partner with the business community, but it never produced much in terms of employment. Most recently, for the summer of 1997 we tried to get the Chamber of Commerce to commit to expand summer jobs for young people, if we did outreach to the youth and got them ready to work. We did our part, and they wound up only providing 11 jobs through the Compact initiative. I think that was really a failure with our program design from the outset — there was a belief that if we tackled the problems of kids, families, and neighborhoods, we would find employers ready to hire our residents. And that hasn't yet proven to be true. Welfare reform is really going to test that — as thousands of families get thrown off the welfare rolls, will employers be there with jobs?

"One of my biggest disappointments is the failure of the business community to help us much in the way of jobs." —Otis Johnson

What they learned:

- Collaborative projects should be judged by their capacity to assemble an increasingly diverse group of stakeholders, tackle increasingly divisive problems, and know when to change course as necessary.
- Big problems like teen pregnancy and school dropout rates can best be attacked by zeroing in on "risk factors" for such outcomes — such as low school achievement and absenteeism — which are easier to measure and influence, letting reformers change course earlier if they don't get results.
- A focus on outcomes should not eliminate less tangible community building and youth development activities like arts and sports and cultural events, that are valuable in themselves, even if they don't produce measurable, traditional "outcomes."
- Although New Futures collaboratives included business leaders, the initiative did not have a successful strategy for getting them to tackle the tough issues of urban unemployment.

7

The Politics of New Futures

"We were always about advocacy."

Little Rock's Don Crary said it in the introduction: The rhetoric of collaboration frequently minimizes the political conflict that real system change requires. Too often, collaborative initiative planners seem to be looking for an extra-political solution to what is essentially a political problem — the dispossession and exclusion of the poor, particularly the poor of color, from the political and market systems that work for most other Americans.

Leaders in Little Rock and Savannah recognized from the outset that their work was political. Both cities' programs were led by executive directors with strong backgrounds in advocacy. Johnson had been a city councilman and a veteran of the civil rights movement, and Crary had run a statewide children's advocacy group in Arkansas before heading New Futures. Both knew that poverty tended to be associated with a lack of political power, not just a lack of income.

And yet both initiatives had to struggle with the balancing act their intermediary role required. Having convened the "movers and shakers" in their cities, they had to work to surface the concerns of the community, especially the low-income families that New Futures was intended to address. Leadership in both cities recognized the need for low-income communities to get organized on their own behalf, but knew that the New Futures collaboratives couldn't do that organizing work themselves. "The missing piece is

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still the low-income community," says Otis Johnson. "Unless they get organized, they cannot succeed in a power game."

Joan: When I read the title of the New Futures report, *The Path of Most Resistance*, my reaction was, Good title: It's funny, it's honest, it makes me want to read the report. But my second reaction was, Wow. If New Futures really represented "the path of most resistance," was that the best place to start?

Otis: I think it was. I still hold to the notion that if we had a school board that was committed to the principle of every child learning to the best of his or her ability, and if we had a superintendent who was committed to that, and a teacher corps committed to that, and a set of parents who would insist on that, and an informed community that said, "These tax dollars will be used to do that," then we could have a public school district that would do what we need. New Futures was an attempt to build all those pieces. The missing piece is still the low-income community. There are not enough organized, well informed groups in poor communities that can go up against these big public systems with facts and strategies. Middle- and upper-income communities do that — they make their schools work, for instance, because they have the kind of knowledge, the resources, and the time to go toe-to-toe with these systems. And that's what we've got to develop in low-income communities.

"Middle- and upper-income communities make their schools work because they have the knowledge, the resources, and the time to go toe-to-toe with these systems. That's what we've got to develop in low-income communities." —Otis Johnson

Joan: But can you really have the people who run the systems be the ones who are expected to push for reforming the systems?

Otis: The answer is no, not alone, but they must be a part of the process, because in the end they have to fund the answer. They have to feel and believe that they're part of the solution. Otherwise they will block you and refuse to allocate the necessary resources. So our work has been to convince them that it's in their best interest to change.

I think one thing that distinguished Savannah and Little Rock from the beginning is that we were always about advocacy. It has always been political for me. It has been about advocacy to improve outcomes. We got hooked into a service strategy in the beginning, which made us detour, but we have always

been about changing these large institutions that have a legal mandate to meet the needs of families, and they haven't done it. And so, for me, it's just an extension of my personal involvement in politics and civil rights work that goes all the way back to the '60s. Personally, from day one, I have envisioned our work as part of a social movement.

Don: I understood it from day one, too, as an advocacy strategy. My background is child advocacy and I knew that for nine years we had worked on the systems change in children's services and it had always been political. I was real aware that children are disenfranchised and forgotten in many ways and that to change that is a political task. I wasn't as aware of it as a social movement. My notion of politics had more to do with making change in the state legislature or state agencies or the public school system — the amount of pressure and constituency building it would take. I had participated in the social movements of the '60s but somehow the connection to this work wasn't as clear to me at the time.

"I was real aware that children are disenfranchised and forgotten in many ways and that to change that is a political task. I wasn't as aware of it as a social movement." —Don Crary

Joan: And is it clear now?

Don: It's much clearer now. It's become clear that social services were a failed attempt to make up for what didn't happen naturally in the environments of these kids, and that "lack" was the result of a process of community disinvestment and disenfranchisement — economic and political decisions largely made outside those communities. To really change that will require a social movement. Meanwhile, a lot of our work now is to say to the power brokers, "Here's the community, and believe it or not, they have the answers." And trying to structure the process so that they turn to the community for the answers.

Otis: Systems can't do it. The community has to do it. But too many people do not discuss politics when they start talking about systems change. Systems change requires a fundamental reallocation of power. And poor communities, unless they get organized, and unless they get the expertise necessary, cannot succeed in a power game. But we know the history of the Community Action Program of the War on Poverty. When folks took com-

munity organizing seriously and started demanding real change, Congress amended the law to cut the legs out from real poor people empowerment. Because when people start acting empowered, then it does get messy. It requires a whole recalibration of the power relationships.

Joan: That's right. But isn't there an incredible tension for intermediaries, between the need to work with the powers that be — work with the mayor, the schools superintendent, the business leaders; cultivate these relationships; treat the leaders with respect; cajole them to do more for low-income communities — and organizing low-income communities, which, when they get organized, are not necessarily going to be respectful, calm, and nonconfrontational towards the powers that be?

Otis: That tension is definitely there. But I think we haven't been clear about the political nature of this work. People tend to work with three different models in this field, and they tend to think their model is the only one that works. One is the collaborative model, where you bring all the different stakeholders together under the assumption that they all have some common interest at heart, and they all want to do the right thing, and they'll come together and do it and everybody will be happy. Then there's the professional planners model, where you bring together experts and planners to analyze the problem and come up with solutions. And because it's all so logical and rational, everybody is going to agree to it and march off to do what's right. Then you've got the conflict model, where the assumption is that the haves and the have-nots possess diametrically opposed interests, and if the have-nots are ever going to get anything from the haves, it will only be through conflict and struggle.

But very few people realize you need all three models to make change. And if I could go back and start over with New Futures, I'd have been much clearer up front about the importance of using all three models, and reconciling them. Right now I'm most concerned about the confrontational piece. We've built the collaborative body. Now we need an advocacy body. Power yields nothing without a demand, and if you don't have a sophisticated advocacy group, there is nobody making a strong demand on behalf of people in the low-income community. We are developing an advocacy group in Area C to

really move the community-building agenda, because collaborative bodies like YFA need somebody pushing from the outside to make change. If the school system is ever going to change, it's going to come from outside community pressure, not from an internal realization that we need reform.

Don: I agree we need to increase the community's voice in the process. At the same time, the community needs a strong YFA, on the other side, to meet them. Because even if you build up the community, if there isn't someone who convinces the city government and the mayor that they in fact need to be at that table, that it's in the interest of the city to be at that table, that they must work with this neighborhood organization on answers — well, I don't know, without that, how it plays out. Because there's plenty of examples of good neighborhood organizations that can't make a dent in city hall.

Otis: I know this: We've got to mount some experiments where we empower local communities to do whatever they need to do on behalf of their kids; to use informal, helping networks as the main strategy. I would love to see a few cities funded over sufficient time to take a group of kids through adolescence. We'd start by being clear on what kind of people we wanted them to be at the end, and then we'd provide whatever they need to get there over 10, 12 years. And we'd be flexible enough to move with them through adolescence, which is a hell of a time for anybody — be flexible enough to ride out the way their family configurations are going to change, doing what we need to do to strengthen their care givers, no matter who they are, to help them be better nurturers. I think we could do it.

What they learned:

- Change requires both collaboration and confrontation, because systems won't reform without a strong public demand for it.
- Community-building intermediaries face tension between the need to maintain ties to powerful stakeholders and to represent the interests of disenfranchised community members.
- Neighborhoods need strong independent advocacy bodies to push for reform.

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Conclusion

The powerful learnings described by Johnson and Crary have already influenced new community programming, both within the Casey Foundation and beyond it. Most new collaborative initiatives at Casey and elsewhere now build in an extended planning period, recognizing the time-consuming challenge of assembling diverse stakeholders behind a genuine action agenda. Where a decade ago, New Futures was fairly unique in providing five years of funding, a new generation of initiatives offer seven and even 10 years of support, recognizing that it took more than five years for America's inner cities to decline, and it will take much more than that for them to rise again. And new initiatives at Casey and elsewhere tend to build in more opportunities for midcourse assessment and correction, recognizing that designers' assumptions may prove faulty when implementation in real cities begins.

Systems reform work continues throughout the country, even though New Futures showed it was "the path of most resistance." But most initiatives today include a neighborhood component, recognizing that change can best be catalyzed and measured where families live. Where "comprehensiveness" was the buzzword for systems reformers in the 1980s, in the 1990s the focus of New Futures, and the field, shifted to "capacity building" — efforts to develop the ability of residents, neighborhood institutions, service providers, and public and private funders to build social capital and community-helping networks, not simply deliver services. Likewise, most systems-reform initiatives today build in a jobs and economic development component, recognizing, as New Futures cities learned, that services alone can't lift poor neighborhoods out of poverty.

Finally, and maybe most demonstrably, New Futures dramatically changed the way foundations and the community-building field think about and provide technical assistance and evaluation. In the work of the Aspen Institute

Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families, and Chapin Hall Center for Children; in the growth of the National Community Building Network, the evolution of the Development Training Institute and the Center for Community Change; and the founding of the Community Building Support Center, one can witness new directions for the field:

- More efforts at partnership between providers of technical assistance and evaluation, and the sites they serve.
- A growing emphasis on the functions of coach, strategist, and sounding board over "expert" in the provision of both assistance and evaluation.
- New thinking about how to help sites develop their own internal capacity for reflection, analysis, and evaluation.
- More attempts to create opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and support.

A decade after its founding, these and other innovations are proving to be the legacy of New Futures. Happily, in Savannah and Little Rock, reformers are positioned to put that decade of learning into practice, and to surface new lessons over the decade to come. They now know that lasting change requires change agents to think in decades, maybe even generations, and to make a long-term commitment to the unglamourous, often discouraging, day-in, day-out task of delivering on the nation's promise of opportunity in low-income urban communities. And that may be New Futures' most powerful lesson of all.

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